

Message Text

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ACTION CU-04

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FOR EA/TB AND CU/EA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OEXC EMIN BM

SUBJECT: FOREIGN STUDENTS/RESEARCH SCHOLARS - SEA BRINE TECHNOLOGY

REF: A. STATE 163006

B. STATE 151488

1. TAKING ADVANTAGE OF DAVIDSON VISIT, WE DISCUSSED GUB REQUEST FOR TRAINING FACILITIES IN SEA BRINE TECHNOLOGY AT LENGTH WITH ITS ORIGINATOR, EX-MAJ. K. BA THAUNG, DIRECTOR-GENERAL, SALT INDUSTRIES DEPARTMENT. GUB REQUEST PROVES TO HAVE BOTH SHORT AND LONG-RANGE ASPECTS OF POTENTIAL INTEREST TO SEVERAL USG AGENCIES.

2. IN SHORT RUN, GUB IS INTERESTED IN SETTING UP PLANT TO EXTRACT MAGNESIUM HYDROXIDE FROM SEA WATER. THIS IS NOW BEING DONE ON PILOT SCALE IN SALTERNS, BUT GUB WISHES TO EXPAND PRODUCTION, BOTH TO MEET LOCAL REQUIREMENTS AND FOR EXPORT, PUMPING SEA WATER DIRECTLY INSTEAD OF USING RESIDUAL BRINE FROM SALTERNS. GUB LACKS TECHNICALLY QUALIFIED PERSONNEL TO STUDY FEASIBILITY OF SUCH PLANT. BA THAUNG HAS BEEN IN CORRESPONDENCE WITH DOW CHEMICAL; HE SAID DOW HAD EXPRESSED INTEREST IN PLANT ON JOINT VENTURE BASIS. SUCH VENTURE INVOLVING FOREIGN EQUITY INVESTMENT NOT AT PRESENT FEASIBLE UNDER GUB POLICY, AND, ON INSTRUCTIONS OF AGRICULTURE MINISTER, BA THAUNG THEREFORE LET CORRESPONDENCE LAPSE (THOUGH HE HINTED IT MIGHT BE REVIVED IF PRESENT LIBERALIZING TRENDS IN GUB POLICY CONTINUE). BA THAUNG WOULD LIKE FOR SOME

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OF HIS CHEMISTS AND CHEMICAL ENGINEERS TO GAIN EXPERIENCE IN

TECHNOLOGY INVOLVED BY VISITING PROCESSING PLANTS ABROAD.

3. DAVIDSON SUGGESTED ESSENTIAL FIRST STEP FOR GUB WOULD BE TO SEEK SKILLED CONSULTANT ALREADY KNOWLEDGEABLE IN FIELD, TO MAKE PRELIMINARY FEASIBILITY STUDY. BA THAUNG CONCEDED THIS WOULD BE DESIRABLE. WE SUGGESTED UNIDO AS ONE POSSIBLE SOURCE OF SUCH CONSULTANT. HOWEVER, IT ALSO OCCURS TO US THAT INTERNATIONAL EXECUTIVE SERVICE CORPS MIGHT ALSO BE ABLE PROVIDE QUALIFIED CONSULTANT.

4. IN LONGER TERM, BUT WANTS SOME OF ITS CHEMICAL ENGINEERS TO GAIN PRACTICAL AS WELL AS THEORETICAL EXPERIENCE IN WHOLE AREA OF SEA BRINE TECHNOLOGY, BOTH TO ASSIST IN EVALUATION AND CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS BY FOREIGN EXPERTS AND TO WORK ON ESTABLISHING RELEVANT PLANTS IF THEY PROVE FEASIBLE. IT IS THIS LONGER-RANGER ASPECT OF SALT INDUSTRIES DEPT PLAN ON WHICH APPROACH TO US WAS BASED.

5. SPECIFICALLY, THE THREE TRAINEES WOULD BE CHEMISTS ALREADY TRAINED TO M.SC. LEVEL AND WITH SOME PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE IN SALT PRODUCTION, BUT WITH NO UNIVERSITY STUDY OF SEA BRINE TECHNOLOGY SPECIFICALLY. THEY WOULD NOT ALL THREE BE AVAILABLE AT SAME TIME, SO TRAINING COULD BE SPREAD OVER 18 MONTHS TO TWO YEARS. BA THAUNG IS NOT PARTICULARLY CONCERNED WHETHER THEY RECEIVE ADVANCED DEGREE. HIS PREFERENCE IS FOR ON-JOB TRAINING AT ONE OR MORE MAJOR CHEMICAL COMPANIES, AND/OR FOR INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH WORK AT BROOKLYN POLYTECH AS SUGGESTED PARA 2 REF A. BA THAUNG PROMISED TO SUPPLY US DETAILED BIO DATA ON PROPOSED TRAINEES WHICH WE SHALL FORWARD TO CU/EA AS SOON AS RECEIVED.

6. WE SUGGESTED POSSIBILITY THAT SOME U.S. RESEARCHER IN THIS FIELD MIGHT BE DISPOSED TO SPEND SIX MONTHS OR A YEAR IN BURMA WORKING ON SUBJECT WITH ASSISTANCE OF SALT DEPARTMENT CHEMISTS. BA THAUNG EXPRESSED KEEN INTEREST IN THIS POSSIBILITY AND SAID HE THOUGHT IT PROBABLY POLITICALLY FEASIBLE.

7. ACTION REQUESTED: (A) FOLLOWING RECEIPT OF BIO DATA, WOULD APPRECIATE DEPT'S FURTHER VIEWS ON PLACING TRAINEES; (B) REQUEST INFORMATION ON IESC PROGRAM AND PRELIMINARY INDICATION ON WHETHER CONSULTANT WITH NECESSARY SKILLS MIGHT BE AVAILABLE FOR WORK
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OUTLINED PARAS 2 AND 3 ABOVE; (C) WOULD APPRECIATE KNOWING WHETHER NSF WOULD HAVE ANY INTEREST IN RESEARCH POSSIBILITY MENTIONED PARA 6 ABOVE, AND WHETHER IT THINKS APPROPRIATE U.S. SCHOLAR MIGHT BE AVAILABLE IN NEXT YEAR OR TWO. IN CONNECTION WITH FOREGOING DEPT MAY WISH CONSULT OFFICE OF SALINE WATER, DEPT OF INTERIOR.

8. IF DOW CHEMICAL IS CONTACTED IN CONNECTION WITH ON-JOB TRAINING (PARA 4 OF REF A), BACKGROUND PARA 2 ABOVE SHOULD BE BORNE IN MIND.

IN THIS CONNECTION, MIGHT BE USEFUL FOR EA/TB TO BRIEF DOW ON
RECENT TRENDS OF GUB POLICY AND POSSIBILITY THAT VARIOUS FIELDS
MAY GRADUALLY OPEN TO VARIOUS FORMS OF FOREIGN PARTICIPATION.
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